



Reconnaissance Company Third Recon Platoon

The following day the platoon was moved to the town of Augny which bordered on the airport of Metz. Here, acting as security for "C" Company the platoon was under heavy shell fire from the forts surrounding Metz, losing T/5 Hantke's jeep and sustaining light damage to one peep from accurate shell fire. As the Krauts were pushed slowly back across the airport, during the ensuing days, the platoon moved section by section to provide close support to the infantry as well as security for the heavy guns. As the pillboxes bordering the airfield were brought under direct fire from the first and second platoons of Company "C", the platoon moved up under heavy sniper fire to the hangar itself, taking refuge from the German artillery in a hangar basement. The Second Recon along with "C" Company continued to give close support to the doughs as the forts were slowly reduced by artillery, TD's, and tank fire. Finally, just before the city fell, Recon was pulled back just in time to enjoy a hot Thanksgiving Dinner.

Saarlautern (Lisdorf)

After completing several missions, during the push to the Saar, the Second Recon was attached to "C" Company and moved with this company

heavy shell fire while preparation for the river crossing by the 378th Infantry Combat Team of the 95th Division, in the city was completed. The morning of the assault Pfc Frakes and T/5 McDonough provided .50 cal. harassing fire at targets in the Siegfried installations on the far banks of the river. This gun received a great deal of counter fire as it was situated between one of "C" Company's 3 inch guns and a 155 mm. (long tom). By noon, counter fire was so intense, that the guns had to be pulled out of position. The days following were very uncertain as the enemy rained thousands of shells into the city. The house in which the platoon was staying took two direct hits and the streets were often filled with flying shrapnel and 20 mm. shells. The platoon lost another peep from a direct hit in spite of the fact that all vehicles had been hidden in barns to provide maximum protection.

After the bridgehead had been finally established, the Second "Recon" was pulled back and sent a few miles south to relieve the First "Recon" at Wadgassen. Since all roads were under fire entering the town, extreme caution was taken to prevent further loss of vehicles. We took over the OP watching enemy activity on the opposite bank of the Saar and the foot patrols at night along the west bank to Saarlautern to prevent infiltration.

In the meantime, the battle of the bulge had begun and Patton was moving north. The platoon received orders to prepare to move.

On March 1, 1945, the Second Recon took up forward positions in the town of Ober Zerf, providing security for the guns of the second platoon of Company "A". Entering the town at approximately midnight, they dispersed their vehicles, and posted security for the night. The lack of knowledge in regards to the tactical situation made them wary and watchful. Just after daybreak, they encountered a platoon of the 301st Infantry clearing the town. They were as pleasantly surprised as we were to meet and additional force of friendly troops.

The enemy occupied the hills southeast of the town and were quick to lay in mortar and shell fire during the day. That afternoon, the infantry having worked their way to the edge of the woods bordering the town, encountered stiff enemy resistance from a house set in the woods. They called back for our M-8 and some added bazooka teams to aid them.



Reconnaissance Company Pioneer Platoon

The infantry proceeded with the attack. Six bazooka teams, consisting of 12 volunteers, headed by S/Sgt Latti and his two assistants, Potter and Bognanni, assumed positions to fire from. The appearance of the M-8 was to be the signal for heavy fire upon the enemy held house. With Lt Gerding as gunner, Pfc Frakes as leader and T/5 McDonough as driver, they arrived and proceeded to pour fire from the 37 mm gun and the vehicle's machine guns on the enemy's positions. The bazooka teams opened up with deadly effect causing several Krauts to attempt to flee, but who were cut down by infantry and artillery barrage on the "Recon" and infantry positions, causing casualties. Among those wounded were S/Sgt Latti, Sgt Bognanni and Pfc J. Meehan, the latter being seriously wounded.

During the barrage, T/5 McDonough drove the M-8 back into a position of cover, dismounting, he got a 1/4 ton vehicle and evacuated both our own and the infantry who were wounded. He subsequently received the Bronze Star for this deed. The infantry was forced to abandon their forward positions due to the heavy artillery and mortar fire and withdrew to the center of town. Eventually the enemy was cleared from the woods and surrounding areas but not before we spent many sleepless and anxious nights, due to the heavy rocket barrages that followed. The platoon was then ordered back to Wawern to help in the reorganization of the Reconnaissance Company and prepare for the final drive to the Rhine.

During the final push to the Rhine, the Second Recon was employed as contact patrols between the front lines and the Battalion CP, and during these trips ran into many interesting events. In one case, Sgt Potter and Pfc Lovas and Monahan riding in a jeep few miles north of Otterberg came upon a little village and noticed several Krauts appearing from the right and left, weaponless. In a matter of moments about 350 Germans swarmed out of the houses and fields to surround them. Luckily for our boys, they were not in a fighting mood, and were quite willing to take orders and march to a PW cage under the direction of this patrol. The boys felt that they had done Sgt York one better.

Another incident worth mentioning was when Sgt McDonough and Pfc Singow were making their way up to the front lines, they encountered a small contingent of German Soldiers led by a Captain making their way to Baumholder. Sgt McDonough using the somewhat limited knowledge of German that he had at his command, asked the captain to surrender his men and weapons as his case was hopeless. The German Officer somewhat reluctantly stamped his feet and cried a little bit but finally handed over his pistol and men for debarkation to the PW cage. As it turned out both McDonough and Singow are the proud possessors of two German pistols. A sad note in the final drive was the overturning of Pfc Hoehlein's jeep causing him to be hospitalized. After two months he finally caught up through reinforcements centers with the battalion. In conclusion, the completion of the reorganization of Reconnaissance Company was effected by drafting men from the First and Second Recons and the firing companies, to form three new platoons, a pioneer and headquarters platoons. S/Sgt Coriell, S/Sgt Griffin and Sgt Bognanni, were granted battlefield commissions as 2nd Lts and 1st Lt Lawrence A. Satterfield took the command of the Company.

Company "A"



Capt. Joseph W. Rood

Looking back over our days of combat, the epic of Metz stands out as one of our major achievements of the Fall of 1944. Our positions near Arry, 3 to 5 miles south of Metz are filled with memories of such names as Purple Heart Hill and 88 Junction. We can remember it just as vividly as on that Sunday morning, September 17th, when, amidst the rain and haze, we proceeded across the Moselle to the new bridgehead, jammed with so much armor that we wondered how much more the area could hold. We can

hear and see those hills and banks of the river being plastered with 88 fire, and above all the vitally important bridge being pounded again and again by enemy artillery fire, shaking and then almost disappearing in a cloud of dust and smoke.

The opposition around Metz proved so severe that we soon changed our minds about seeing the Rhine in a few days. The nights came when we fired salvo after salvo of 3 inch ammo into the neighboring citadels. The barrages lasted for hours, even into the dawn and when we paused for a respite, the entire area for miles around seemed to buckle with the flash and din of friendly and enemy batteries maintaining a steady curtain of fire — of hits and near misses. The cold came too — as did the rains. The Summer changed to Fall and the hard earth gave way to an oozy layer of mud, the days of rolling across France had vanished, as had our dreams of a quick victory by Thanksgiving Day. We looked impatiently for the Spring, when the armies would start to roll again, and settled back into an almost endless downpour of rain and its ally, General Mud.

A new surprise was in store for us; Lt DeMaria presented the platoon with a kitchen -- and honest to goodness kitchen — and behind those

stoves we saw the faces of Maurice Le Blanc, Joe Indelicato, Glenn Poling, Bill Falls, Norman Dorion and Richard Berry. It was a long trek up the hill, especially when the water gushed down in rivulets and it was difficult to pick a dry spot for ones feet, but it was surely worth it. No one can complain that he did not eat heartily at the time Fort Driant was giving the Allied world a headache. No matter how often the "ton and a half" would get mired in the slime, Doc Greer, Larry Schofield and Homer Yates would get it going again, bringing back supplies and food. We called ourselves and were, "the best fed platoon in the ETO".

Many will rave about the whole fried chickens, roast pork, roast beef, mashed and boiled potatoes, vegetables, the lemon, apple, pineapple pies, the chocolate layer cakes, and how the hot coffee hit the spot. Bill Romano and Bernard Sculthorpe continued to rise promptly at 6 A.M. every morning to drive their vehicles into Arry for water. Frank Volpe would hasten up the high hill every morning to give the cooks a hand and he was admirably successful in keeping the fire blazing for the coffee. That grill fire and kitchen was a favorite meeting place and workshop for the fellows. George Foster and Bill Spears were unique in giving a helping hand with the cooking and the dandy pancakes they made attested to that fact. Sgt Kesselhuth was the able ax-wielder who always had a huge pile of wood by the fire. We could always see Bill Herte and Philip Walker giving him a hand or going and coming in the jeeps with more supplies, and in the background we could usually spot that able crew of Ed David, Joe Manzo, Spike Alibrandi and Frank Huebl helping wherever needed.

Once again it became our turn to go back to the firing position on the hill. It meant the expenditure of thousands of more rounds, when every round was worth its weight in gold. It meant the spending of hour upon hour, night after night in the downpours of rain, cursing, slipping and sliding through the mud, straining every muscle to help deliver the knockout blow to the fanatical defenders of Metz. Half-blinded by the muzzle blast from the guns, we loaded shell after shell and sent them on their way, backing from the recoil and yelling for the missiles to do their bloody work. It was a constant succession of flashes, thunder, the acrid smell of burnt powder and gases, and above all the din, the calm but high and steady voices of Lt DeMaria, Sgt Rantila or Sgt Kesselhuth calling out the fire commands. It gave us hope

and a thrill when on several occasions the observation post reported back that we were scoring direct hits on enemy columns and targets. The boys were at their peak, and the steady work brought only good cheer. Harvey Pearlmutter did exceptional as a recorder and Sgt. Eugene Thorn was his able self, setting up communications. We remember L. Mucci, B. Miller and Tom Quinn always cracking jokes and helping everyone's morale. Then there was Pappachristou, our demolition specialist, and Kraus and Garofalo with their lively and lengthy bull sessions at chow



"A" Company Headquarters Platoon

time. And we have never forgotten Elsie, our cow. Grady Farmer and Zeb Nemeth took great pains every day to milk this lovely female beauty in that battle area. Elsie was our pride and joy, and we admired her tremendously for her look of scorn when 88's came dangerously close to her. Her milk was like ice cream in a desert to us. She never seemed to realize that a war was going on and one night wandered over to our huts munching grass. Frank Kerzner saw a dark image moving about and called "Halt!" miraculously Elsie stood her ground, her big head loomed

in front of our approaching Corporal and was recognized. The gun was lowered and Elsie was saved; thus, what would have been tragedy became a very funny incident.

When we moved back to our direct fire positions, the boys started to pitch in and excavate a huge portion of hill for a new kitchen. This was to be log cabin style. They really went at it with a passion. The shovels, picks and axes were grinding away and slowly but surely we were going places. Cpl Tom Harkins took great delight in seeing the work progress and put in four straight days of it himself, not counting plain supervision in which he was aided by Cpls Jurva and Lessard. Tec 4 Roland Boucher and Bob Beeman who were fast and furious workers with shovels, impressed and inspired everybody to speed up the job. The morale of all was ably lifted by Sgt Charles Snyder who spent many afternoons among the men, telling at long and interesting detail, the episodes of Purple Heart Hill and the resemblance of the area to that of his memories of Tennessee. Before many days elapsed, the excavation was made and the construction of the kitchen began with great assistance being given by Cpl Joe Favreau whose ability as a carpenter is recognized by all.

The kitchen was built in record time and Lt DeMaria soon had all hands fixing this nook and that, making adjustments, stocking supplies and setting up an A-1 cuisine. We had many visitors and guests at chow including our late Captain Butler and our present Captain Rood, also Lieutenants Diltz, Craig and Gerding and others too numerous to mention. There were times, as Marvin Hazelwood used to say when one had to perform extra duties to properly digest the delicious meals, particularly his favorite Southern Fried Chicken. November came in with heavy steady rains that turned the area into a quagmire of mud and water. There was even a snowfall and the winds were bitter cold and damp. But Metz had only a week or two to survive, and the final drive had begun with the 5th, 90th and 95th Divisions on the move.

The Moselle River was rising and flooding many places. The current was fierce and we wondered at the 90th Division making its Koenigsmacher bridgehead against so many obstacles. Sgt Jose Montoya seemed fascinated by the raging waters as was Harry Lucas who served cereal and coffee in the mornings. They would both glance at the spectacle of the flood and ruined foxholes and wonder if the rain would ever stop.

Sidney Knapp needed particular encouragement; the dugout which he had built with Jim Gilhuly's aid and developed into one of the best, had collapsed from leakage. Tim Armon recalls how he stumbled down the steps of that once-famous abode and fell into the water with a great splash. Everyone for yards around was awakened by his angry cries in the storm. Goldstein passed many hours by the fire which he made every morning and by which he and the second section dried their wet shoes and socks daily. Christmas mail began arriving and the boys, J.Kahn



"A" Company First Platoon

in particular, gave parties donating cans of various edibles and boxes of sweets. During these trying times, when we were changing socks and shoes as often as possible, and Herr Goebbels was reminding the German people that we would not be home by Christmas, Pop Chiseski was always ready to joke with all and sundry persons who came to make themselves new and better-looking individuals under his skillful scissors. Our stay at Arry built up to a steady climax; ahead lay the memor-

able days of Hellendorf and the Rhine. Every day the Flying Forts bombarded the enemy positions in greater strength. On Election Day they came over by the hundreds and we knew that the long siege of Metz was over, the same Metz which had not fallen to direct assault for over a thousand years. When we left Arry and the fall of Metz was accomplished, we could look back and realize that much water had flowed under the bridge since that rain-soaked Sunday morning in September when we had arrived with our illusions that the Rhine was only a few days away. It was a Heinie pig who betrayed his master's hiding place to Cpl Leo Gastaldon one morning in Borg. It all happened while Gus was idling in the doorway surveying the blasted buildings in town; he noticed the pig rooting in something that could only interest a pig. A bottle-top was exposed and Gashouse became more than interested. With the vigor he used in attacking the pile, he no doubt set an all-time record for dung-pile pitching, and the Famous Foist had thirty-five gallons of schnapps, courtesy of Gashouse, a pig and the dung-pile.

Then there was the time in Ober Zerf when Joe Kahn was a combat man and didn't have his present CIC worries. He went out the rear door to attend to his normal functions. The outhouse was about 200 yards away and since it was more comfortable there, Joe decided to make the trip. Suddenly there was a terrific explosion and a blinding flash. Joe reeled under the impact of the rocket explosion and when he recovered his senses he looked around and lo! The outhouse no longer existed; he decided he wasn't interested any longer, anyway.

Tribute should be paid to the men in each crew for doing the swell job of cooking for their individual crews. During the rat race through France and in the muddy Moselle region, the portable gas stoves did a job that Oscar of the Waldorf would be proud of. Our rations were Ten in Ones and C's and, combined with the potatoes we bartered for our meals, were always the high spot of the day. In France we had the welcome treat of two fresh eggs every morning. Served with bacon from our rations, we could hardly ask for anything more in combat. When Thanksgiving Day loomed, the rumor went around that a turkey would be issued for each crew. We know of one crew that had six chickens penned up just in case that didn't happen. But Thanksgiving Day came around as it should to men far from home and on that day the Company moved to the little town of Saligny; our planes and artillery had visited there before us and

their were few houses left standing. The wonder of it all was that in the gathering darkness of that day, the chow call sounded and in a spot that was far more appropriate than the Waldorf for that meal, we were served our Thanksgiving dinner. There was more than enough of all the food that we associate with that day and as we walked with messkits clanging in the stillness of that ghost town, we not only felt but also knew that we were in the best Army in the world, Uncle Sam hadn't forgotten his men scattered everywhere.



"A" Company Second Platoon

Coming up to the Moselle region, the First Platoon was faced with a serious problem; they were without a platoon commander and platoon sergeant. However, the records show that through the combined efforts of Lt DeMaria and S/Sgt Paul Tompson, the men acquitted themselves in a manner befitting a first class combat unit. For the Lieutenant, the job was doubly difficult as he already had his own platoon to care for and, in addition, had to be present at all the harassing fire missions both platoons were assigned to. In the two months that the Company stayed along the Moselle with the guns of the forts fairly bristling at them, S/Sgt Thompson had the complete co-operation of every man in the platoon, and it is due to their combined leadership and initiative in those trying days that the first platoon established itself as a unit to be reckoned with.

The story of our Company would be incomplete if some mention was not made of our commanding officer, Captain Joseph Rood. Somewhere along the line he acquired a thorough knowledge of the workings of an enlisted man's mind, and that understanding has given us all the feeling that though we were under army rules, we were, at the same time, individuals. His one concern has always been his boys and the men in Zerf had that proven to them time and again. We had the opportunity to see him under fire and looked forward to his daily visits to see that all had enough rations and that none had suffered injury. We think he is tops as a company commander and dare anyone to say differently.

It was during the race through France, when every day found us miles beyond our previous days area, that things were always happening to keep us alert. We would bivouac and invariably there would be small arms fire in the vicinity; the enemy had become completely disorganized and turned up most anywhere. Krauts roamed the fields in small bands and one night in the vicinity of Sous near Chartres the situation came to a head. It was there that everyone decided this was a peaceful enough area and took his shoes off when he bedded down. The first one to detect anything unusual was Cpl Joseph Sicignano, who later died in action on the Moselle. He thought he heard a noise in the underbrush and challenged; his answer was small arms fire. All the boys joined in the skirmish that followed and eight of the enemy were captured and one killed. This was not destined to be the end of the affair, however; less than an hour later Cpl Maurice Favreau was fired on from the woods. Once again everyone joined in and we added eight more prisoners to our bag for the evening. Needless to say, all hands decided to do without the pleasure of sleeping with shoes off for the rest of the night.

We were bivouacked in an open field and the following morning Skelly, Heaney and Gabbinelli had to answer the call of nature and chose a wooded area near by. While they were in the necessary position, rifles leaned against the nearest tree, a Kraut walked up to them with the usual "Kamerad". They made the prisoner wait a bit and then marched him into the CP mumbling, "You can't even do your duty these days".

The outpost that Cpl Roland Bernard had in the Borg area proved to be the longest one kept in combat for this Company. Together with Fifield, Demboski, Murphy, Gecan and Chamberland, he stayed in the outpost

near the Campholz Woods for over two months. It was there that Dick Fifield was awarded a Bronze Star Medal for directing accurate artillery fire on an enemy concentration and wiping out an enemy machine gun position. The incoming shells played havoc with them constantly and in one of the barrages Dick was wounded superficially but refused evacuation and carried on with his good work. The information these boys gave the infantry proved invaluable when the attack routes used by the enemy plus information gleaned from the prisoners they took, undoubtedly saved many lives.



"A" Company Third Platoon

The death of Captain Butler in Campholz Woods on February 4th left the Company in a complete state of lethargy. We had seen men killed and death, we knew, respected no rank or individual. We had seen Captain Butler take chances before; he would never let a gun go into position without first reconnoitering the area himself; whenever a man was wounded he would be there with the medics. The men respected his judgment and it was a black day for all when we were informed that our CO had been killed in action.

The little town of Zerf will always remain indelibly printed in the minds of the men who were there. It looked like a discarded Hollywood scene of warfare as we rolled into town in the gathering darkness. A one lane dirt road led into town and there was a medic jeep and an ambulance pushed off to one side with their personnel dead in their seats. Buildings were shelled wide open as we went further into the town and the smell of death was everywhere. The stillness was frightening; not a sound was heard except the four guns being moved into position. That silence was not to be with us for long, however. The next day we looked around us and there were enemy dead all about. The positions of death are always grotesque and the dead Jerry directly in front of one gun seemed to be in the process of getting to his feet when fate beckoned. The next night two of our guns were moved to the town of Baldringen nearby and Zerf was held by the two remaining guns plus a few security men, the Company forward CP and some infantry. Incoming rockets, artillery and mortars were with us for the ten days we stayed in Zerf, and it was always a source of inspiration to the boys to see Captain Rood, our new CO, come checking around walking unconcernedly through the shell fire to see if everything was going along all right. One night a well directed incendiary set fire to one crew's living quarters and in the glare of the burning building the enemy never ceased to direct his heavy fire on the well illuminated target, while we scurried about seeking other shelter. It will always remain a great source of wonder to us that only one man, Cpl Tom Lemos, was wounded during our stay. The scene hadn't changed much when we left. The buildings though, were completely wrecked and the jeep and ambulance were still pushed off on the side of the little dirt road.

It was at Wochern, Germany that Cpl John Nemeth spied a bull ambling through the town and bet John Black that he could lead it wherever he wanted to. Unfortunately the bull spied him at the same time and John took off for the shelter of a house with the bull in close pursuit. Evidently the fierce bovine was not aware that his breed was not permitted indoors and followed right inside, starting a mad scramble for safety by the men in the house. Finally Johnny grabbed the bull by the horns and yelled for assistance. Wally Bernat was safely at the head of the stairs and, sizing up the situation, called down, "Hell, you dont need me, get a half-track". Johnny won the bet, but only on a technicality.

When we came down off the hill on the Moselle, we moved into the shell-racked town of Corny; the town was filled with booby traps and mines and the enemy was still firing direct artillery fire into it. There was little place to live except former wine cellars, which were dank and dreary at best. Living under those conditions made us impatient and restless, particularly when the only illumination available was an improvised lamp consisting of a bottle of oil and a rope wick; the resulting smoke drove us out for a breath of fresh air and that is how Whitey Dopps found a still. Alcohol and Dopps go well together and in practically no time at all he was turning out something vaguely resembling schnapps. When we left Corny a few days later he was heard to murmur, "Too bad there is not more room on the half-track; I had that still really producing."

We finally managed to get up energy enough to do a little washing of clothes in a watering trough near our "home", and hung the finished products out to dry on a widow sill in a wrecked building nearby. Ten minutes later we dug through the debris caused by a direct hit and mournfully left our shrapnell filled clothing to rest in pieces. Undaunted, however, we tried the same thing the next day and damned if they didn't do it again.

We were debating what to title this episode — Action at Hellendorf or the Rest Camp for the War Weary Second. This was the town the Fighting Second will never forget; it was a regular back-to-the-farm movement for the city boys. When fellows like Frank Huebl learn the art of milking a cow, and Ed David takes up horse-back riding, it merely proves that a GI can be adapted to almost anything. The only blemish on an otherwise perfect record was when Marvin Hazelwood was wounded there and had to convince some skeptic it actually happened, after all, this was Hellendorf.

Hugh Henshaw had the unbeatable record for hard knocks in the Company. Along the Moselle he dove for the comparative safety of his fox-hole during an intense mortar barrage and wound up being lifted out by the concussion of a big fat one landing nearby. He tried another hole nearby and the same performance was repeated. The story opens again at Wochern where Hugh this time was sprawled on a bed thinking back on his narrow escapes. Suddenly a 155 went off outside and he found himself being lifted clear off the bed and dumped against the far wall

of the room, just ask him about it sometime and listen to some real cussin'.

On 17 September 1944 Company "A" was ordered to cross the Moselle River and take up positions on the east bank to protect the bridgehead from the north and northeast against armored attack. Thus started the most miserable existence the company ever faced in combat. The crossing was made under adverse weather conditions and strong enemy artillery fire. At that time, the 3rd Army had driven so fast that the supply trains had not caught up with them. We dug in along the bank and lived in the muck and mire caused by the incessant rains. The bridge was knocked out three times by artillery fire and it was in this area that Cpl Joseph Scignano, Pfc Walter Sibigroth and Pfc Otto Moslacher were mortally wounded during a mortar barrage laid down on our positions. On 21 September we were given the additional mission of harassing the enemy with artillery fire; the firing had to be done at night and necessitated moving from our direct fire positions to indirect fire positions under cover of darkness. The guns then had to be moved back and a twenty four hour guard maintained against surprise enemy armor attack. Often the guns would become mired in the muck and it would take the combined efforts of two half-tracks and crews to keep them moving. Words fail to express the horror and hell of the Moselle sector, where the slightest noise at night was sufficient to bring down an artillery barrage. The constant rains made every foxhole a swimming pool, and rations and water had to be brought in on foot through the sticky mud because the noise of a motor was enough to cause all hell to break loose. As the late Captain Butler wrote in a message to Battalion, "in my opinion, if this command had not the highest morale throughout, all these missions could not have been accomplished as quickly and as thoroughly as has been done".

Company "B"

Those thirteen days of hell



Capt. Carl A. Black

and capture of the fortress city of Metz.

It was cold that night and a penetrating drizzle was falling.

You sat hunched and miserable under your ponchos as the Half-tracks bumped jerkily along the muddy roads. There were a few, however, who worried and bitched more about what the next assignment would be, but they were laughed down by the rest. After all, no matter what was to come, it couldn't be as backbreaking and as nerve-shattering as the successful siege

Yes, the weather was your immediate problem and bitching about it failed to make you warmer or dryer.

But that was all before Saarlautern; Saarlautern with its countless pill-boxes and its heavy concentrations of SP's and eighty-eights.

Gradually, as the wet and uncomfortable ride progressed, the guys did less and less bitching about the weather. You started encountering more and more activity as you moved forward. You'd pass a bunch of dough-foots moving up; a stream of infantry peeps as steady as the rain started coming the other way. The boys with the big guns, the artillery, started laying them in, firing more than was usual for just a night's harassing fire. You'd hear the whining whistle of the shells passing overhead and you'd unconsciously duck until you were certain it was outgoing stuff. Then the muffled boom, boom, of the guns firing would come slowly drifting in on the wind followed closely by the boom of the shells exploding as they smashed into their targets.

Then suddenly the word came down and you completely forgot about the rain, the cold, and the ache in your bones.

“ . . . We’re to support a river crossing . . we dig-in on the west bank tonight and hit them in the morning . . .”

Still, it couldn’t possibly be as rough as the Metz deal so you didn’t worry too much about it. But you must have been thinking of it because you didn’t even notice that it had stopped raining and the moon had broken through until you heard someone curse the ‘unwelcomed’ light.

You’d dug many a gun position but this time all records were broken because the Heinies were right across the river and “damn that moon”. Even so, it was about four in the morning before you were satisfied with the emplacement and could head for a nearby cellar for a few minutes shuteye.

Just a minute ago you had shut your eyes and now someone roughly shakes you and growls, “Let’s go, they’ve jumped off,” and by the time you had fully awakened Heinie 20 mms have started spraying the west bank of the Saar River. So you snake out to your gun position and ready the piece for action; one man in the ammo pit, three hugging the ready trench passing it up, one loading, another crouching behind his sight and still yet another grasping the lanyard with hands suddenly moist with sweat.

“ . . . Fire mission . . . all guns . . . targets of opportunity . . . fire at will . . .”

“Ready,” from the loader.

“Set,” from the gunner and the guy at the lanyard takes up the slack.

“Fire!”

For a moment you were dazed by the concussion but you hadn’t the time to think about it because you were too busy getting the next round set. The smoke of the blast hid the target momentarily so you couldn’t see the results of your shot. But you’re not kept in ignorance too long for over the telephone comes the rasping voice of the forward observer:

“Over . . . down 200 . . . right 100 . . .”



"B" Company Headquarters Platoon

Hurriedly you made the necessary adjustments and were ready to fire again. This time the concussion didn't jar you as much, for all around your guns, other guns doing the same job as yours, have also been firing and by this time you had adjusted your ears and nerves to the roaring.

"... It's in there ... now blast it open ..."

And once again you went through the routine of readying the piece although, at the moment, you smiled for this was anything but routine. This was the real thing; this was what you'd trained so hard and so long for and cursed so many sergeants when they gave you the cannoneers hop. Besides, the Heinies weren't taking the shelling laying down; already the pillboxes were answering your fire with barking eighty-eights and their artillery was starting to register in on your fully exposed gun positions. But you stuck to your guns — the First Platoon on the crossroads, the Second Platoon on the road leading to the river, and the Third Platoon on the flats of the river itself — and continued pouring hot, well aimed, armor piercing lead at the numerous targets across the river to the tune of 363 rounds of HE and 645 rounds of APC for the day.

And before the operation could be written off the books as successful, the three platoons, twelve guns, had fired over 6000 rounds of ammo and had neutralized and/or destroyed close to 50 enemy pillboxes.

After that first action-crammed day you started living a nightmare. Never could you completely relax. At night you'd be so tired and overwrought that you'd think nothing could keep you from a well earned sleep. But you found out differently. There was guard to pull — enemy patrols were constantly infiltrating the lines. There were the incessant enemy artillery barrages which shook the very ground you lay on. There was the ammo to haul and the rations and water for the next day. Blown out communications had to be fixed. New wire had to be laid. Gun emplacements had to be reinforced, ammo pits filled, foxholes deepened. From the period 5 December 1944 to 17 December 1944, thirteen days of pure hell, during which time you were subjected to an average estimated enemy shelling of 5000 rounds per day in their abortive attempt to smash the bridgehead, you continued firing as requested and were officialy given credit for substantially maintaining the bridgehead.

Subjected to 5000 rounds per day! Can mere words ever hope to describe what that meant?

Can they paint the picture of taut nerves being drawn tighter and tighter across the drum of sanity as each day and night passed without relief or cessation?

Can words bring back such men as De Bruhl and Brousseau who were killed?

Can words heal the ripped flesh or ease the pain of those who were wounded: Joyce, Curry, Luca, Steine, Spanoler, Potts, Grandinetti, Koch and Hall?

Can they ever eradicate the memory of eating, sleeping, urinating and defecating in the same foxhole?

Or the memory of your shelter being smashed down over your head as you crouched in the cellar praying, perhaps for the first time in your life?

No, words cannot ever hope to do it. But the story is there none the less. It's written indelibly and for all eternity in the eyes of the men who were there. Take a good look, Soldier. Remember?

An attack on our village

Obersehr

They said afterwards they were from the Sixth SS Mountain Division, and they were proud of it. Their objective was to cut the supply lines to Trier. The village of Obersehr was to be taken, but they had not counted on so many of our men being there. Only a Company of Infantry was supposed to be holding it.

No one contradicted them for we were still cut off. Actually, we had less than half a Company; twenty-four Infantry men, two crews of an Infantry cannon Company, and three sections of the first platoon of Company "B" of the 774th T.D.Bn., at that time a towed gun Bn., primarily trained to combat enemy armor.



"B" Company First Platoon

Their attack on our village started on a night as black as pitch; their forces consisted of a full Company of Infantry plus a platoon of engineers. Their tactics were excellent; the village was quietly by-passed, encircled with machine gun positions, and infiltration into the main street was started.

As one kraut was setting up a machine gun between two vehicles in front of the TD, CP, he was shot by Sgt Carl G. Parsons. The Germans retaliated by mowing down two of our men, Sgt Frank Pilyls and Pvt Everett L. White, who had been on guard at the opposite end of the village and had been edging their way through the inky darkness to find out what had happened. More of the enemy could be heard moving into the village but could not be seen. Our Infantry took their post at a corner house, bringing the two wounded TD men with them. Pfc Walter Fongemie, at an outpost called in to warn the CP that more jerries were coming, but no help could be sent to him.

On the opposite flank at almost the same moment, Pvt Frank Marion and Pvt Roy L. Robinson opened fire with a 50-Cal. machine gun and the cries of the enemy told that several were hit. When the gun jammed, Marion field stripped it and put it back while under murderous machine gun crossfire. The gun jammed again, so bringing it with them they withdrew into one of the houses where they joined the rest of the first TD section. The 2nd section was located directly across the street.

Lt Charles L. Smith was heard making his way down the street, trying to reach his wounded men and to contact the Infantry. They hailed him and informed him that the wounded were with them. On his return to the TD CP he was hit twice by enemy fire. In spite of intense enemy fire from automatic weapons, Sgt Sherman T. Norton crawled out and half dragged, half carried the Lt to safety. Lt Smith is a man of large proportions, being about six ft and 190 lbs., but Sgt Norton, of Indian and Irish decent, is immense, with his 6 ft 3 inches and 230 pounds.

In the meantime S/Sgt William J. Murphy and Pfc Thomas T. Legista stripped all the vehicles of ammunition and weapons. Tec 4 Harry S. Hansen crept out to the M-20 and sent a radio message. These actions drew concentrated fire from all directions. Sgt Hurlbut D. Martin dashed across the street to inform the 2nd section of the situation, but they were well aware of it. Action quieted down on both sides until daylight.

A dirty, grey, thick mist came with the dawn. The M-1 rifles of the Infantry began to bark, picking off krauts who were trying to observe

from fox-holes outside the village. The enemy were revealed in possession of a house opposite the TD CP from which they now hurled incendiary grenades. Pfc Roy M. Arendall ran about the CP buildings smothering the grenades with blankets. A German bazooka shell ripped a huge hole through a wall upstairs, narrowly missing Cpl Louis L. Balsirieri, who was stunned by the concussion, hurled into the back of the room, and covered with debris. He recovered and went back to his post. From across the street S/Sgt Arthur Cross, an Infantryman, called to Sgt Norton, "Hey TD, we will stick it out to the cemetery". This brought the laconic reply, "Yeah, Boy!"

Not long afterwards Lt John R. Stewart called for artillery. Shells screamed over the roofs in a devastating barrage. The men held their posts in the buildings, disregarding the danger. One structure outside the village which the enemy was using for an ammo dump was reduced to a rubble after being set on fire, destroying large quantities of their ammunition.

Next a report came in that help was coming, "Slowly, but surely". During a lull in artillery fire, a German Officer came out with a white flag to urge us to surrender as we were cut off for miles and greatly outnumbered. S/Sgt Murphy, Pfc Legista, and Pfc William J. Bergeron, (a 30-Cal machine gun in his hands) rejected this offer with very strong language and informed him we had help on the way. The German laughed and said, "Don't be comical". He returned to his position, the flag went down, and the fight was on again.

Then artillery, both American and German, poured into and around the village. This time everyone tried to take cover. Screaming meemies exploded all over the place, doing the enemy more harm than good, but they were becoming desperate. When the artillery would stop for a minute the Heinies would open up with their automatic weapons and yell at the top of their voices.

At long last, all hell broke loose when an American tank leading two others smashed into the town. The effect on the GI's was electric. They poured from the houses to direct the tanks and the Infantry climbed up on them. The krauts ran in confusion in all directions. Sgt Martin and Pvt Robert N. Grassman rushed upstairs into one of the houses and

knocked off every Jerry that tried to escape across an open field in the rear. Not one made it, although six tried.

After the ensuing surrender a German officer haughtily told an interrogator, "I did not surrender, I was captured". Seventy-eight others were "Captured" with him. Almost as many were found killed in the streets and in the foxholes outside the village.

The Infantry later remarked that without the TD's, the situation would have been impossible. The TD's then said that without the Infantry they would have all been dead.

Schomerich

East of the Saar River in Germany, the terrain climbs slowly to a summit and then runs quickly from hill to hill, many of which are densely wooded. In the spring of the year there is almost continuous rain and fog. Everything seems to contribute to making it hard and difficult ground for combat.

Along this sector in the first week in March, a thin line from Pellingen to Zerf was established by the 94th Infantry Division and attached units. In the vicinity of the town of Schomerich, one of these units with "L" Company of the Division was the 2nd Platoon of Company "B", 774th TD. Bn.

The leader of the platoon, Lt Wm. Murphy, deployed his guns to safeguard the town; the first TD section was in position with a field of fire to the east; the second, to the north; the third and fourth, to the south and southeast.

On March 6th, at about 0130 the platoon was alerted by an Infantry CP because a large scale attack was expected. Preparations were made to give the enemy a warm welcome — a reception that was to last for thirty-six hours.

The Germans preceded their attack with a devastating artillery barrage at 0430. After an hour of this, the krauts made a fanatical charge across an open field, their only cover being the total darkness of night,

screaming "Sieg Heil, Heil Hitler", and "Yanks die". The second TD section was directly in their path. Into the centre of this howling pack, Cpl Harold W. Johnson and Pvt Benny Gerstner sent withering bursts from a .50 calibre machine gun. The krauts fell back, shouting with rage and pain. Johnson jumped to the 3 inch TD gun nearby, loaded, and depressing the tube fired into the middle of the clamor. Gerstner quickly joined him and together they continued to shoot until every round on hand was expended. When daylight came the carnage was observed; arms, legs, and all the parts of human bodies were strewn everywhere in the field.



"B" Company Second Platoon

In the meantime, others of the crew, Sgt Vincent Mele, Cpl Jesse Motta, Pvt Walter Mazurkiewicz, T/5 Henry Kohout and T/5 Edward Haburshock had taken defensive positions with the Infantry in a house on the edge of town and not far from the gun positions. They were holding off, with intense fire, the Heinies who had infiltrated. Some of these krauts got close enough to take positions in a TD half-track which was parked beside the building. From upstairs, a hand grenade was tossed into the vehicle, setting it aflame and destroying six of the enemy. The blaze lit up to whole area which frightened the Jerries and caused them to disperse since they were easy targets for the men in the house.

Then enemy fire came from a building directly opposite which had been a post for our Infantry mortar men. The TD's thought their fellow soldiers were shooting at them in error, but from the sound that every combat man knows, it was soon detected that it was from enemy weapons. Everyone turned his attention to this house and for three hours it was blasted with bazooka, machine gun and small arms fire with such effect that the krauts sent up the white flag. They came out with their hands above their heads and bringing with them the captured Americans who had been confined in the cellar. About this time the enemy began to retreat, leaving behind some snipers.

On these Johnson concentrated with his fifty calibre machine gun, keeping them pinned down. Everytime a sniper would lift his head, Johnson would let him have it. This lasted for the greater part of the afternoon. Becoming impatient with this procedure Johnson went boldly out to flush the sniper. His friends called a warning to him but in his determination he ignored it. He got one of them, then another. He was hit once but continued firing until he finally fell over mortally wounded. Although it came later, at 0630, the assault on the position of the first section, which was defending due east, was no less severe. The same tactics were employed by the Germans who attempted to terrorize our men with artillery, mad man screams, and wild charges. To meet the final fanatical rush, Sgt Jack Boyette had hurriedly prepared his men. Two of these, Cpl Walter Kalvio and Pfc Elbert Bryan opened up from the front yard of a house behind a stone fence and in a sweep of fire inflicted many casualties. In the house, upstairs rear, T/4 Edward Mulroy, Pvt Tony Hierholzer and Pvt Herbert Goldberg kept shooting constantly to keep the krauts from overrunning the defenses from behind. At posts on the first floor were Pvt George Sawyer, Pfc James Finch and Tony Elchhook, whose fire repulsed the enemy trying to get into the building. Unable to reach the structure from any direction, the krauts brought up Panzer Fausts. One projectile from these weapons ripped a hole in the wall of the room where Mulroy, Hierholzer and Goldberg were located, almost demolishing it — the concussion knocked down the three men, but they recovered and continued to fight. After the bazooka fire, the Germans tried to infiltrate, one getting into the hayloft of the adjoining barn. He began to shoot at some American Infantry down the street, from practically over the heads of our men who were in the house on the first floor. He was chased out with grenades. Other krauts pressed

so close that a suggestion was made to get rid of German souvenirs. Some of the men made an inventory mentally of their possessions, which included such articles that once belonged to the Wehrmacht as belt buckles, iron crosses, pistols, and helmets. After a very brief discussion it was agreed: "damn it, let 'em come and get 'em".



"B" Company Third Platoon

In afternoon the enemy began to fall back, resorting to long range rifle and artillery fire. Finally, at what they thought was a safe distance, they formed columns and retreated. At them Kalvio and Bryan fired with a range beyond the burn out point of a tracer. The next day many enemy fatalities were counted; the results of that firing.

While two of the four TD gun sections were so busily engaged, the Platoon CP came in for a large share of the action in the defense of the town. At 0630 that morning in the shadowy, grey light of a cloudy dawn, Lt Murphy and Sgt Wesley Streetman discerned two vague forms digging. Believing the diggers to be our Infantry taking protection against the German artillery that had been coming in, they watched for awhile. A sudden realization came to them that the men with the shovels were krauts. Streetman's rifle spoke quickly, killing one and causing the other to run behind a bank where a number of the enemy was waiting. The battle was on.

Now the CP became a fortress with guns shooting from every window and door. On the first floor were Pvt Luther Westbrook, Cpl Lynn Welch, Pfc Douglas O'Brien, Pfc Thomas Mounsey and Pvt Robert Haffly. On the second floor, Lt Murphy, Sgt Streetman and Pfc William Orso. The top floor had Pfc Leonard Gagliano and Pfc Gabriel DeSilva, inseparable companions. S/Sgt Thomas Monahan was ubiquitous; he seemed to be all over the building, up and down, front and rear, encouraging the men, checking and carrying ammunition, and taking quick shots at the enemy from all positions.

From second floor observation it was estimated that from sixty to seventy-five Jerries had surrounded the CP. To meet this situation Lt Murphy employed the tactics of firing as much and as frequently as possible in order to deceive the enemy into thinking that he had a strong garrison instead of a mere eleven men.

Then came the first onslaught — a rush at the front door of the house. This was driven back by the machine gun fire of Westbrook. Those of the enemy who were not mowed down crawled to the bank. The krauts that could be seen on the other side of the bank from upstairs were picked off by rifle fire. The next stratagem of the enemy was bazooka fire. One of these hit the wall between Westbrook and Welch, stunning both men and damaging the machine gun; they recovered and Westbrook changed over to an M-1 rifle. Another shell struck the room upstairs, injuring Lt Murphy and Streetman. While medic T/5 Alvin B. Garlington administered first aid to the injured men, Orso held on alone, leaning out of the window for better observation and accuracy in his fire. He eliminated the Jerry with the bazooka. Everyone continued to fire, forcing the krauts to abandon their position behind the bank.

Next, Sgt Streetman, volunteering, made a dash to the Infantry CP to obtain information of the general situation. He drew heavy small arms fire from the krauts who were in houses he had to pass to reach his destination. At the Infantry CP he was told that the enemy had infiltrated into several buildings and the Infantry Company Commander, Captain Griffin, was contemplating calling for artillery to shell the town. He was anxious to know Lt Murphy's reaction to this. Streetman returned with the message, again running the gauntlet of small arms fire. The platoon leader quickly gave approval to the suggestion of artillery; Streetman

made another round trip safely. Then shells of our artillery rained with deadly accuracy on the houses of the enemy and around the town, forcing those who were able to withdraw from the town.

Just before dark, the Germans, having reorganized and having the support of armor, started an attack which never got close to the town because of the arrival of American tanks. These made such a loud continued noise that Sgt Mele climbed to the top of a building to identify and observe them. He was wounded by the shrapnel of a shell that hit the roof. From then on, all through the night that followed there was high tension among our men because of the expectancy of another attempt to take the town.

The next morning the situation was revealed as quiet, and a report was given that the Germans had retreated to a safe distance. Captain Griffin of the Infantry estimated that from five to six hundred of the enemy had been repulsed. He added further that without the TD's the town never would have been held. The TD's said nothing — exhaustion set in because none of them had eaten or slept in thirty-six hours.

"C" Company history

"Beware the ides of March"



Capt. Donald Polden

That was the warning given Caesar centuries ago. And the Germans would have done well to have heeded it too. For, it was on the 15th of March that the 1st Platoon of "C" Company completed converting to Self-propelled guns and began its drive from the vicinity of Saarburburg and which culminated in the capture of Frankenthal on the Rhine River one week later.

Mixed feelings greeted the first order to move out. We all realized that we would be given tougher assignments from now on, and we wondered how our TD's would stand the gaff. We had prepared for this movement all day and when the order came at 0300 to move, everything was in readiness. Ready rack full of HE and AP; .50 cal. MG half loaded, and the 90 mm in firing position. Thus, we moved out to relieve the 2nd Platoon of "A" Company, east of the Saar River and to take up our positions in the forthcoming offensive.

Before noon of the 16th, we joined the forward elements of the 302nd Inf. Regt., to whom we were attached. Slow progress was made all through the day, and at dusk, we came in view of our objective, a town on the outskirts of a thickly wooded area. The order came down, "TD's front and center".

Men tensed at their battle stations, guns were checked and loaded, hatches were closed, infantry climbed aboard for the dash into town. This was it. Motors roared as the TD's moved forward. Gunners were picking out targets as best they could in the gathering dusk. Fire belched from the muzzles of the 90 mms, as high powered projectiles crashed into and shattered the defenses of the enemy. Fires were raging out of control through the town as we moved in to mop up.